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EXPERIMENTAL USE OF MACHINES IN THE TRAINING OF INTERPRETERS.

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AN EXPERIMENT TO IMPROVE THE METHOD OF TRAINING INTERPRETERS TO INCREASE SPEED OF TRANSLATION FROM ONE LANGUAGE TO ANOTHER, ONCE THE VOCABULARY BUILDUP HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED, INVOLVED THE USE OF THE TACHISTOSCOPE AND THE CONTROLLED READER, MACHINES USED IN SPEEDREADING COURSES. THIS INNOVATIVE PRACTICE HELPED TRAIN THE INTERPRETERS TO INCREASE CONCENTRATION ABILITY AND REACTION SPEED AND TO RETAIN INCREASINGLY LARGER NUMBERS OF WORDS AND VASTER CONCEPTS. THE MEMBERS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP, TEACHERS BORN AND SCHOOLED IN GERMANY BUT WHO HAD LIVED MOST OF THEIR ADULT LIVES IN THE U.S., WERE ENCOURAGED TO INCREASE THE SPEED OF THEIR INDIVIDUALLY CONTROLLED FILMSTRIP CONTAINING LISTS OF KEY WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS, BEFORE TAPING THEIR TRANSLATIONS. AS A RESULT OF USING THIS AUTOINSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUE, THERE WAS AN AVERAGE 25 PERCENT INCREASE IN TRANSLATION SPEED WITH ALMOST NO LOSS IN ACCURACY. TO ADAPT THIS ESSENTIALLY VISUAL TECHNIQUE MORE EFFECTIVELY TO THE SPECIFIC ORAL NEEDS OF INTERPRETER TRAINING PROGRAMS, APPROPRIATE MATERIALS AND A SPECIALIZED APPROACH MUST BE DEVELOPED. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE "INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING," VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2, JULY 1967, PAGES 141-144. (AB)

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C. Whiting

On constate trois étapes dans la formation d'un interprète: 1. la période pendant laquelle il s'agit d'élargir le vocabulaire de l'étudiant, sa maîtrise des termes techniques et des expressions idiomatiques, 2. la période pendant laquelle il s'agit d'augmenter la rapidité de la traduction, et 3. une période pendant laquelle le professeur a surtout à enseigner à l'élève à retenir un grand nombre de mots et de concepts avant qu'il lui soit permis de les traduire. La plupart des professeurs n'arrivent jamais plus loin qu'à l'étape 1.

Un groupe d'étudiants, bilingues d'allemand et d'anglais, entraîné par l'auteur, n'avaient pas réussi à dépasser une certaine limite de vitesse. Comme il s'agit en principe d'augmenter la vitesse de réaction de l'étudiant, un tachistoscope a été introduit, machine où un mot ou une série de mots ou de chiffres sont exposés pendant un temps très bref (fraction d'une seconde). Une liste de mots importants (mots clés: 'efforts', 'confirmed', 'majority vote') fut établie, les mots furent présentés dans le tachistoscope et les réponses de l'étudiant enregistrées sur bande magnétique. Une augmentation moyenne de 25% de la vitesse de traduction de textes ordinaires et de textes techniques fut constatée.

On propose que les universités, instituts et écoles qui s'occupent actuellement de former des interprètes se procurent des tachistocopes et s'en servent dans l'entraînement des élèves.

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In der Dolmetscherausbildung unterscheidet man drei Stufen: 1. die Erweiterung des Wortschatzes allgemeiner und technischer Art, 2. die Beschleunigung der Übersetzungsgeschwindigkeit, und 3. die Aufgabe des Lehrers, den Studenten zu einem großen Erinnerungsvermögen an Wörtern und Begriffen zu erziehen, bevor er sie übersetzen darf. Meist kommt die Ausbildung über die erste Stufe nicht hinaus.

Einer Gruppe zweisprachiger Studenten (Deutsch und Englisch), die vom Vf. unterrichtet wurden, war es nicht gelungen, über eine gewisse Geschwindigkeit hinauszukommen. Um die Reaktionsgeschwindigkeit zu erhöhen, wurde ein Tachistoskop eingesetzt, das ein Wort, eine Wortgruppe oder auch Zahlen während einer sehr kurzen Zeit (Bruchteil einer Sekunde) zeigt. Eine Liste von wichtigen Wörtern (Schlüsselwörter: ‚efforts', ‚confirmed', ‚majority vote') wurde aufgestellt; die Wörter erschienen im Tachistoskop und die Antworten wurden auf Tonband aufgenommen. Dabei wurde festgestellt, daß die Übersetzungsgeschwindigkeit bei normalen und technischen Texten um 25% gestiegen war. Vf. machte den Vorschlag, Universitäten, Institute und andere mit Dolmetscherausbildung befaßte Schulen mit Tachistoskopen auszurüsten, die im Unterricht eingesetzt werden.

Anyone who has trained interpreters usually finds that there are distinct stages of training: *Stage I*, a period in which the major stress is placed on building up

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the student's vocabulary in the foreign tongue, technical expressions, idiomatic linguistic patterns etc; *Stage II*, here vocabulary is no longer the major problem; now the problem is to increase the speed of the student's translation from one tongue to another; *Stage III*, the final stage in the language laboratory in which the teacher tries to build up the student's ability to retain a large number of words and concepts before he is allowed to translate them [1]).

It is my experience that most teachers of interpreting rarely get beyond Stage I. However, last year I had the opportunity of training a small group of nature students who were to all intents and purposes truly bilingual. All teachers by profession, they had been born and spent their school years in Germany, but most of their adult life in the United States, with periodic visits to Germany, so that they had a comprehensive vocabulary and fluency in both English and German. But in spite of their linguistic ability, the group still faced the problem inherent in Stage II: how could they quicken their pace of translation from one tongue to another? Using the traditional methods, I and another instructor tried to accelerate their translation speeds without too much loss of accuracy by reading to them selected passages [2]) –they were not allowed to see these, as interpreting is an aural and not a visual discipline–which they were then to interpret in an impromptu fashion. As time passed, we lengthened the number of words which the student had to retain before he was allowed to translate them.

The method paid dividends as it always does, yet after a certain number of weeks it became clear that the students had reached a plateau of learning and that they now seemed unable to increase their speed of interpreting nor to increase the number of words that they could retain at one time. Accordingly I sought around for some other way of tackling the problem and by chance came across the machines used in the so-called 'speed reading courses'. In such courses the students are taught to build up coordination and mobility so that they will become more comfortable readers, to develop better directional attack in their reading in order to become more thorough and systematic, to achieve quicker word reaction and the ability to think and associate more rapidly. In this process, two machines play an important role: the *tachistoscope* and the *controlled reader.*

The tachistoscope is a machine, operated by the student, which when a lever is depressed, reveals a word or series of numbers for a fraction of a second, whereupon the student writes down the word or numbers. The basic idea underlying the device is that it will help the student to quicken his reaction and channel his concentration. The controlled reader, on the other hand, is a machine which can project a story or an article on the wall or screen continuously at rates ranging from 60 to 1,000 words per minute. This machine has its pace adjusted by the student and again it aims at heightening concentration and

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[1]) See Alexander Lane: *Handbuch der Übersetzer, Dolmetscher u. Fremdsprachensachverständigen* (Mainz 1955) Diemer, for further details of training.

[2]) We used as our textbook: C. Whiting and G. Gilbertson: *‚Spiegelgespräche' – a Textbook for Interpreters* (London 1967). Longmans Green, Ltd.

developing the student's ability to see more quickly and associate words with ideas more rapidly.

Most of the material that is provided in the commercial courses for such machines was of little use. For example, any German material would have to appear in the controlled reader so that the German verb structure was immediately apparent to the student, otherwise his ability to translate quickly would be greatly impaired. This difficulty was overcome to a certain extent by preparing our own material. [3])

Working with the tachistoscope first, we evolved a list of important words and key expressions which appear again and again in interpreting, such words as 'efforts', 'confirmed', 'declared', 'majority vote' etc. These the student 'fed' to himself by means of the tachistoscope, recording his answers on tape. As we wished to emphasize oral and not written ability (the latter being stressed in the speed-reading courses), we made the student record his answers on tape and not on paper.

After five or ten minutes practice on this machine—and very strenuous practice it is—the student was then placed in front of the controlled reader and 'fed' sections of material for translation into his tape recorder. Over the ensuing weeks the student was encouraged to increase the speed of the film strip (the control is handled by the student himself) and naturally his speed of translation.

Of course, we were not able to increase the student's speed of translation in the same amazing manner which is often the case with students of speed-reading where their reading-rate is sometimes doubled or trebled. Our students were working under different conditions—reading but *also* interpreting from one language into another. *All the same we did record an average increase in the speed of translation of general as well as technical texts of twenty-five per cent with almost no loss in translation accuracy.*

The machines have the great disadvantage that they are part of a visual discipline whereas interpreting is primarily an aural one; further there is no professionally produced material available at present for use in the tachistoscope and the controlled reader. But in spite of these defects the machines can provide a valuable asset in Stage II of training interpreters. They concentrate the student's attention; allow him to work individually and at his own pace, yet giving him the means to increase that pace according to his desires and not those of the teacher; and finally and perhaps most important of all (especially in the interpreter's working situation—the conference hall) they help to encourage and promote his speed of reaction. But perhaps the best proof of the machines' value is exemplified by the fact that, when the students moved to Stage III of the interpreter's training programme, i.e.to the language laboratory and the actual working situa-

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[3]) It is suggested that the reader refers to the publications of the Educational Development Laboratories, Huntington, New York, for further information. A simple introduction to the theories of the machines can be found in their *Skimming and Scanning Program* booklet.

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tion, we had not one case of what is called 'lab breakdown'. By 'lab breakdown' one means that moment when the student-interpreter throws his hands up in despair and laments he cannot take in any more words ; it's all too much for him! It is a periodic happening in most interpreter training programmes and well known to most teachers of interpreters. However, it never once made its appearance in Stage III of our course, due to the fact that the student's ability to retain and then translate a large number of words at a high speed had been so well conditioned by his previous weeks on the machines.

RESEARCH: (Suggestions)

At the present time there are some two hundred odd universities, interpreter institutes and private schools in Western Europe which devote themselves wholly or in part to the training of interpreters. In most cases, their methods are amateurish and haphazard due to the fact that training in this discipline has only existed to any great extent since the end of WW II.

It is suggested that some of these institutions should look into the possibilities of integrating the tachistoscope and the controlled reader into Stage I and Stage II of the training programme, using them not only to encourage speed of translation and ability to retain ever increasing numbers of words but also possibly to teach vocabulary.

It is also suggested that attempts should be made to work out a pattern of instruction that could be used in the preparation of film strips for the two machines, e.g. in content, format and the positioning of grammatical structures in highly inflected languages.

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